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Capital extends helping hand to wildlife

Beijing's 367,000 hectares of nature reserves and scenic spots account for 22 per cent of its land area

By XIN WEN

For the past 15 years Fang Chun has been observing migratory birds in the north-western Beijing district of Yanqing, where their numbers continue to rise.

This year Mr Fang, 54, telescope in hand, began monitoring the birds at Wild Duck Lake National Wetland Park from the start of February. In a log recording his observations, he wrote: "On February 12, the first whooper swan of the year appeared at the lake, while on February 18, five whooper swans, two smews (diving ducks) and nine mallard ducks came. Close to 1,000 common cranes also flew around the lake."

An estimated 100,000 migratory birds rest at the lake every year before moving further north for the summer, Mr Fang said.

"In November and March, Wild Duck Lake becomes a 'swan lake' and there are magnificent views of the birds," he said.

Mr Fang, who used to teach physical education, turned his hobby of observing wild birds into a job by learning about avian species from books and photographs. He also sought help from experts.

He can now identify different species of migratory birds at a single glance.

Mr Fang and three colleagues at the Wild Duck Lake monitoring station record the species and number of migratory birds. The team is also quick to rescue injured birds, treating them onsite during the migration seasons in spring and autumn.

The Wild Duck Lake bird monitoring station, set up in 2005, was originally designed for watching a range of wildlife but has since become an observation point for migratory birds.

There are 88 wildlife monitoring stations in Beijing. Ten of them are at national level, 33 at municipal level and the remaining 45 at district level. They basically cover all key areas of water bodies, the birds' migration routes and their resting places.

Mr Fang said that since February he and his colleagues have observed more than 650,000 birds.

To minimise human disturbance, Mr Fang said the wetland park closes from November to March every year. However, the team still needs to patrol the lake several times a day to check birds' health.

"If it is extremely cold we bring some food for the birds to enable them to survive the tough conditions."

By last month Beijing was home to more than 500 species of terrestrial wildlife, up from 461 in 1994, the Beijing Gardening and Greening Bureau said.

Shi Yang, senior engineer and director of the Beijing Wildlife Rescue Centre's wild animal department, said that last year alone the centre treated 1,189 animals from 140 species.

"The rare species we rescued and treated were mostly found by Beijing residents," Mr Shi said.



Top: Whooper swans arrive at Wild Duck Lake in Yanqing district, northwestern Beijing. Above left: A black crane is pictured at the lake. Centre and right: Shi Yang (left) and a colleague treat injured birds at the Beijing Wildlife Rescue Centre. PHOTOS BY ZHANG YAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

The number of volunteers eager to treat wildlife at the rescue centre is rising, and I sense that more people are learning about the lives of wild creatures in the city."

Shi Yang, senior engineer and director of the Beijing Wildlife Rescue Centre's wild animal department



Nearly every year from April the Beijing swift, a small bird, frequently appears at the rescue centre, he said.

Mr Shi usually gives these birds food six times a day. He strokes them, waiting for them to open their mouths, before popping the food in.

The birds, which have thin white lines on their breasts and four short claws, epitomise Beijing's avian diversity. In April the swifts arrive in the city to breed, and move on to southern Africa in early August.

Mr Shi said: "Beijing residents are familiar with the swift. In recent years I have received a rising number of calls from people across the capital saying they have found injured swifts and want us to treat them."

"The number of volunteers eager to treat wildlife at the rescue centre is rising, and I sense that more people are learning about the lives of wild creatures in the city."

Wang Tian, 28, of Beijing, a co-founder of an environmental protection studio, said he became



Twilight years bring sparks of inspiration

By CHENG YUEZHU

"Help the aged, don't just put them in a home, can't have much fun in there all on their own," the British indie band Pulp laments in its song *Help the Aged*.

In China, with the popularisation of mobile technology and social media, some senior citizens are proving that they can indeed have a lot of fun on their own. With or without external support, they can be admired and even adored by many.

On the video streaming and sharing site Bilibili, known for being an on-line community for the young, a video with more than five million views is titled "I'm 90. Can I be a vlogger on Bilibili?"

The video was uploaded last year by Jiang Minci, the oldest vlogger on the site, who now has more than 372,000 followers. Viewers clicking on any of her videos will be met with a flood of comments floating across the screen that read "Hello, grandma!"

She was introduced to the website last year by her grandson known as Dou Dou, a second-year high school student and also a Bilibili vlogger.

"I didn't know about these things at all before," Ms Jiang said. "When I saw him on this site I asked what he was doing, and he just said, 'I'm uploading videos,'" Ms Jiang said.

"I thought, if I make videos about the highlights of my life, it can be a form of entertainment for myself and possibly provide some positive historical reference."

Ms Jiang's videos are mostly accounts of her life, from living a turbulent and nomadic childhood during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45), to pursuing an education that allowed her to become a railway engineer and, more importantly, being an open-minded and independent individual.

"I thought of recording my life stories by writing an autobiography, but when I was a child I attended school rather late due to the chaos of war,



From Top : Lu Zhengyi has gained 1.84m followers with his wood carving videos. Jiang Minci's first video, uploaded on Bilibili in April 2020, was soon flooded with on-screen comments that mostly read "Hello, grandma". PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

and I then specialised in science-related subjects, so my writing isn't good. I feel that shooting videos is easier than writing."

Now after nearly a year on Bilibili, she has not only managed to tell her stories, but also acquired the fundamental skills of a vlogger. Her videos are formulated and edited mostly by her, with technical help from Dou Dou.

"We seniors should learn new things," Ms Jiang said. "We shouldn't think that because of our age we can give up trying and learning. I feel that there's nothing you cannot learn as long as you put your heart into it. It's all a matter of personal determination."

Apart from encouraging young people to keep an open mind and have a thirst for knowledge, she also focuses on her experience and social issues, calling for public attention to the predicament the elderly face.

Another influencer of advancing years on Bilibili, and arguably one of the most popular, is Lu Zhengyi. Having uploaded 57 videos, he has gained 1.84m followers and a total of 100m views.

Most of his videos show him carving a square chunk of wood with a chisel and a small sander, creating the likenesses of famous characters from animation, comic books and video games.

In his biography he writes: "I am Lu Zhengyi. I'm 27 years of age, a young wood artisan." This is, in fact, a joke. He was 72 when he wrote that last year, and 27 is the age when he first started wood carving.

His admirers affectionately call him *xiaolu*, meaning little Lu. The term of endearment was first given to him by his cameraman, known as Awei. Mr Lu accepted it with pleasure.

Mr Lu is a craftsman who lives in Xianyou county, Fujian province, a place with a tradition of making classic furniture.

Initially a photographer working with Mr Lu's son, Awei thought it would be a good idea to combine traditional craft with the anime culture adored by young people, so he approached Mr Lu and showed him pictures of some of the genre's famous animated characters.

Mr Lu was keen to try his hand at carving something new for a change. Awei then recorded Mr Lu's process and uploaded the video on Bilibili. It quickly became a hit.

"I didn't expect that young people would like wood carving," Mr Lu said. "In the town in which I live it's very rare for people under 30 to learn the craft or to even buy a wooden sculpture."

"I'm very happy to be on Bilibili, because I get to know so many young people. Now whenever I have free time I check the comments on my videos. It enriches my life a lot."

Thoughts from a garden of reflection

By ALEXIS HOOI

The site lies within Peking University, in a quiet spot that points to its beginnings as a personal sanctuary of a Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) Manchu prince.

The garden fell into ruins following looting by invading foreign armies in the late 19th century, but a groundbreaking ceremony in 1986 began its transformation into the Arthur M. Sackler Museum of Art and Archaeology, marking restorative East-West cultural exchanges away from turbulent times.

The China historian and poet Vera Schwarcz, in her book *Place and Memory in the Singing Crane Garden*, illuminated this fascinating corner of China's cultural landscape, with her study lauded for revealing "how the garden becomes a vehicle for reflection about history and language".

Ms Schwarcz said dialogue at home and abroad continues to be an important part of China's legacy of culture, with ample reason for optimism amid the country's rapid growth.

"Without doubt, China has progressed hugely beyond anything that anyone could have imagined in the last hundred years," she said.

Ms Schwarcz is Mansfield Freeman Professor of East Asian Studies, Emerita, at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. During 1979 and 1980 she conducted research at Peking University as part of the first group of US students admitted after diplomatic relations between the US and China were established. Her highly acclaimed works include books about Chinese intellectual history and poems about cultural remembrance.

The university has also recorded the experiences of Ms Schwarcz and its other luminaries under a major oral history book project. "Chinese intellectuals, throughout the 1920s



Vera Schwarcz at the Freeman Center for East Asian Studies at Wesleyan University. The US scholar has written many books about Chinese intellectual history and poems about cultural remembrance. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

and 1930s, had asked 'What are our shortcomings as a people?'" she said. "These questions about Chinese character that they raised have helped the accomplishments that you see today. They are part of an introspective voice, carried throughout the 20th century which allows for the 21st century's accomplishments."

"Chinese students who went abroad in the '20s and '30s and those who are studying abroad today — many have been my own students in the last 30 years — were questioning intellectuals. I started as a historian for *laowai* (foreigners) and over the last 30 years most of my students have been Chinese who come to the West. Their interest, about who they are, what they can contribute — these are the things that make China truly great."

Self-reflection is an important part of the cultural dialogue, Ms Schwarcz said.

"Dialogue, as I've discovered over 50 years of China work and of dancing between East and West, has to occur more quietly. It's not only a matter of policy, but it has to occur more deeply. At its best, cross-cultural dialogue is not only what you learn about the West and what I learn about China. That's the easy part, and I've been privileged to be part of that dialogue."

"It's by asking questions about yourself that cross-cultural conversation allows us to return to our own traditions and to see afresh with questioning eyes. That's the deepest, most meaningful part of cultural dialogue. That is a marvelous opportunity which I hope will take place in the 21st century."

"In terms of a legacy of culture, of course there are reasons for optimism. My students who have returned to China are poised to make many extraordinary contributions."

The optimism must occur, amid the rapid development that China finds itself in, in a cultural context that builds upon the past

meaningfully, Ms Schwarcz said.

"When I was at Beida (Peking University), the cultural legacy was amply evident, in calligraphy, in art. There's a difference, however, between public display of culture and genuine cultural revival, and the ongoing critical development of cultural legacies. That's true for every culture, including America."

"Just celebrating the past is not enough. How to build upon the past in an open-minded, vigorous fashion, every culture is struggling with that."

"In China, public celebration, public codification of what traditional culture means, may restrict the possibilities for cultural contributions."

"But there's no question that there's reason for optimism. The material well-being which many people in China are enjoying is not in itself enough for cultural vibrancy. You could be rich and be prejudiced and backward. Being rich is not the same thing as being genuinely forward-looking."

The optimism must be within a cultural context "in which genuine pluralism can survive ... which I think China is poised for", she said.

The dialogue that is occurring between China and the rest of the world offers "a very meaningful opportunity for mutual compassion and empathy", she said.

During her time at Peking University she met major intellectual figures such as Feng Youlan, Zhu Guangqian, Yue Daiyun and Tang Yijie. This led to seminal work on New China.

"It was my time at Beida and these interviews, walking that beautiful campus ... everything for me happened in that little corner of Haidian (a district in Beijing where Peking University is located). I am forever indebted to Beida for opening up my eyes when I arrived. I really learned Chinese history by listening to people and to the actual terrain."



The Arthur M. Sackler Museum of Art and Archaeology at Peking University is one of the cultural sites featured in Vera Schwarcz's book. She conducted research at the university during 1979 and 1980.

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